

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8934

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

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C O N F I D E N T I A L TEL AVIV 7156

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, IS, JO, XF

SUBJECT: WEST BANK AND GAZA ELECTIONS

REF: (A) STATE 260910 (B) TEL AVIV 6453

SUMMARY: WE ANTICIPATE THAT ISRAELIS WILL BE TAKING SOUND-
INGS UNTIL LAST POSSIBLE MOMENT BEFORE DECIDING WHETHER TO EXPAND
FRANCHISE FOR WEST BANK MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS IN SPRING 1976.
DURING RECENT DISCUSSIONS ON WEST BANK AUTONOMY, ISRAELI
OFFICIALS HAVE NOT ASSOCIATED THAT SUBJECT WITH ELECTIONS.
WE ASSUME FONMIN ALLON IS ACTIVE PARTNER IN GOVERNMENT
DISCUSSIONS OF WEST BANK ELECTIONS IN VIEW OF HIS LONG-
STANDING INTEREST IN EVOLUTION OF OCCUPIED TERRITORIES.
END SUMMARY.

1. CONVERSATIONS WITH ISRAELI OFFICIALS KNOWLEDGABLE
ABOUT WEST BANK AFFAIRS OVER PAST FEW WEEKS HAVE TENDED
TO DOCUS ON PROSPECTS FOR AUTONOMY, RATHER THAN ON
MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS. ALTHOUGH AS STATE REFTEL INFERS
THERE IS DEFINITE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE TWO SUBJECTS,
IT IS WORTH NOTING THAT ISRAELIS THEMSELVES HAVE NOT
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BROUGHT UP SUBJECT OF ELECTIONS IN CONTEXT OF AUTONOMY.

THIS MAY BE SIMPLY BECAUSE ELECTIONS ARE MANY MONTHS AWAY, WHEREAS AUTONOMY HAS BECOME CURRENT TOPIC OF CONVERSATION. IT IS MORE LIKELY, HOWEVER, THAT AT THIS POINT ISRAELIS IN FACT DO CONSIDER THEM AS TWO SEPARATE TOPICS, WITH QUESTION OF HOW TO ENCOURAGE ARABS TO PARTICIPATE MORE FULLY WITH OCCUPYING REGIME DISTINCT FROM QUESTION OF HOW (OR WHETHER) TO PROVIDE MEANS FOR THEM TO CAMPAIGN AGAINST THAT REGIME.

2. ON SPECIFIC QUESTION OF WHETHER TO EXPAND FRANCHISE PR MAINTAIN RESTRICTIVE JORDANIAN LAW INTACT, DURING CONVERSATION REPORTED TEL AVIV REFTEL WE WERE INFORMED THAT GOVERNMENT INTENDED TO CONTINUE ITS SOUNDINGS AMONG WEST BANK POPULATION FOR SOME TIME BEFORE REACHING FINAL DECISION. WE WOULD GUESS DECISION COULD WELL BE DELAYED UNTIL LAST POSSIBLE MOMENT.

3. AMONG FACTORS INVOLVED IN ISRAELI DECISION ON VOTING ARRANGEMENTS IS STANCE PLO (AND OTHER EXTERNAL PARTIES) MAY TAKE TOWARD ELECTIONS. IN RECENT DISCUSSION OF CURRENT STATUS OF PLO ON WEST BANK, SPECIAL ADVISOR TO MINISTER OF POLICE (DANON) SAID THERE WAS EVIDENCE THAT PLO WAS PLANNING TO AVOID OPEN CRITICISM OF MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS IN FAVOR OF QUIETLY GETTING SOME OF ITS PREFERRED CANDIDATES ELECTED. HE CLAIMED THAT THIS TACK HAD BEEN TRIED IN VILLAGE COUNCIL ELECTIONS JUST COMPLETED, WITH RESULT THAT SEVERAL "PLO SUPPORTERS" WERE AMONG NEW FACES ELECTED. HE EXPLAINED THAT HE MEANT BY THIS YOUNGER MEN WHOSE RELATIONSHIP WITH PLO WAS "MORE THAN CASUAL". HE SAID HE HIMSELF WAS NOT YET SURE WHAT CONCLUSIONS SHOULD BE DRAWN FROM THIS CONCERNING HOW BEST TO CONDUCT MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS IN SPRING.

4. PLO FACTOR WOULD SEEM TO SUPPORT ARGUMENTS IN FAVOR OF MAINTAINING JORDANIAN ELECTORAL LAW AS IS. EXPANSION OF FRANCHISE WOULD OPEN ROLLS TO RELATIVELY LESS PROSPEROUS AND LANDLESS VOTERS, SOME OF WHOM MAY HARBOR LOCAL GRIEVANCES AGAINST EXISTING POWER STRUCTURE WHICH COULD BE EXPLOITED BY PLO. CHANGE IN FRANCHISE WOULD ALSO CONSTITUTE UNILATERAL ALTERATION OF LEGAL STRUCTURE BY OCCUPYING POWER, WHICH ITSELF WOULD BECOME ISSUE FOR DISSIDENT WEST BANK

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ELEMENTS, AND IN WHICH THEY WOULD UNDOUBTEDLY HAVE SUPPORT OF ARAB STATES. PLO POSTURE, HOWEVER, IS ONLY ONE OF MANY FACTORS ISRAELIS WILL CONSIDER BEFORE REACHING DECISION.

5. WE HAVE HEARD NOTHING AS YET ABOUT WEST BANK-WIDE ELECTIONS OR FORMATION OF PARTIES. DANON HAS MENTIONED THAT GOI'S INTENT IS TO PROVIDE FOR FREE EXPRESSION DURING CAMPAIGNING, INCLUDING ALLOWING VERBAL SUPPORT FOR PLO.

HE HAS EXPRESSED HIS OWN PERSONAL CONCERN, HOWEVER, THAT ISRAEL MIGHT ADVERTISE FREE ELECTIONS AND THEN GET COLD FEET IF CRITICISM OF OCCUPATION BECAME TOO BITTER. THIS WOULD APPEAR TO BE REAL POSSIBILITY, AND ONE THAT WOULD ONLY BE INCREASED BY OPENING UP ELECTIONS TO CONSTITUENCIES AND ISSUES BROADER THAN MUNICIPALITIES.

6. AS FOR INVOLVEMENT OF ALLON IN DECISION-MAKING ON THESE QUESTIONS, IT WOULD BE SURPRISING IF HE WERE NOT VERY ACTIVE, BOTY BECAUSE OF HIS LONG-STANDING INTEREST IN EVOLUTION OF TERRITORIES, PARTICULARLY WEST BANK, AND IN VIEW OF THE OBVIOUS IMPACT OF THE ELECTIONS ON THE BROADER REGIONAL PICTURE. ISRAELI ABILITY TO SHOW ELECTION CAMPAIGN AND ELECTION ITSELF AS STEPS FORWARD ON PALESTINIAN QUESTION, HOEVER, DEPENDS AGAIN ON NOT GETTING COLD FEET ONCE INITIAL PROMISES ARE MADE.

7. RE GAZA, WE HAVE ALREADY REPORTED DESIRE OF SHAWA CLAN TO POSTPONE ELECTIONS THERE BEYOND NEXT SPRING. DANON CONFIRMED THAT, AT PRESENT TIME, WEST BANK AND GAZA ARE BEING CONSIDERED QUITE SEPARATELY BY GOVERNMENT. TOON

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